Chapter 5

THE PUBLIC AND YOUR COLLECTION

I. INTRODUCTION[1]

Prior to this final chapter, our manual has focused on the ways that archivists collect, arrange, describe, and preserve historical documents. Indeed, given the material-centric nature of an archivist's concerns and actions, it is sometimes difficult to remember that archivists are not in the business of keeping archival materials solely for the material's sake. We purposefully collect, arrange, describe, and preserve historic materials so that they can be used by future researchers.

This chapter introduces the broad range of considerations and activities that archivists commonly employ to facilitate and promote the use of their collections. In aggregate, these public service activities represent a core archival function and play an important feed-back role for monitoring the appropriateness and effectiveness of other archival functions such as appraisal, arrangement, description, and preservation. Moreover, the development and adherence to well considered access policies is vital to ensuring the long-term preservation and security of your collections.[2]

II. PUBLIC SERVICES

Public or Researcher Services are rubrics that are employed to label the types of research assistance and facilities that a repository provides to support researchers as they use historical records. Good researcher service and document access practices have two essential, if slightly opposed objectives: first, to support researcher access to your collections and second, to monitor and control researcher use in a manner that mitigates any harm or damage that may result from document use.

To best serve these two goals, an archival repository should strive to provide the following services and resources to its researchers:

- **Direct and supervised access to archival materials.**
- **Duplication services.**
- **An appropriate research environment.**
- **Remote reference via email, surface mail, and telephone.**

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[1] This chapter is heavily based on text, exercises and outlines created by Hal Keiner.
[2] Mary Jo Pugh, Providing Reference Services for Archive and Manuscripts, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005): 24-25.

The Reference Policy

Your reference policy is the document that describes the rules and conditions under which researchers may access your collections and research services. It should be specific enough to avoid confusion and misunderstandings, while avoiding overly legal or archival jargon. In addition to publicly posting this policy in your repository and, when applicable, on the web, it is a good and common practice to repeat key elements of this policy in your researcher registration form or application. Requiring researchers to sign this form helps to ensure that they have taken the time to read your repository's access rules and agree to abide by them.

Because a reference policy is a comprehensive document about your researcher services and collection access procedures, the process of writing one is best approached not as the construction of a flowing narrative, but as the assembly of a series of discrete policy elements. Moreover, because archival security concerns and access practices are less unique than internal collection practices, it is often possible to borrow and apply policies and procedures that have been developed elsewhere. The websites of many well established archival repositories such as the Bentley Historical Library or the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library contain extremely useful documentation of their researcher policies and procedures.

Let us now review the key policy elements and considerations that should be reflected in your repository's Reference Policy.

Identity and Purpose

As with your collection development policy, a reference policy's introductory paragraph is typically a brief statement that clearly state's the repository's name, institutional affiliation, and mission. From the fictional CAGA example below, we learn that:

> The Carolina Azalea Garden Archive (CAGA) identifies, collects, arranges, and preserves the historical records of The Carolina Azalea Garden. CAGA's collections are comprised of non-current records of varying formats having enduring administrative, legal, fiscal, historical, or scientific values that were created by the staff and volunteers of the Garden. These collections are made available to CAGA staff and scholars as well as other researchers in accordance with the stipulations recorded in their accession records.

Using this example as a guide, the introductory section of your reference policy should be sure to explain the basic archival activities that your repository carries out, the general subject matter contained in its collections, and the types of researchers that it will serve.

Location, Hours, and Other Useful Information

Provide information about your repository's location (street address if possible to allow for online mapping), research hours, parking lots, and dining facilities as well as any other information that a prospective researcher will need to make a successful research trip to your repository. If your research hours are somewhat limited and you are willing and able to accommodate a researcher's schedule make this clear.

Registration Requirements and Procedures

Clearly and succinctly state your repository's registration requirements and procedures. To ensure the security of your collections, your institution must create procedures and forms to monitor and document researcher activity. You should design your registration form to capture basic information such as a researcher's full name and contact address as well as more detailed information about their collection use and reading room visits. Many repositories require researchers to present a current photo ID as a part of this process. The information you collect should allow you to retrospectively determine collection use and identify researchers who were present during a specific period. You should maintain and keep registration and call documents for several years after they have been created so that you are able to retrace collection use in the event of theft, loss, misfiling, or damage.

Additionally, the registration form and reference policy should be used to convey information about fees and any other access conditions or procedures that may delay a researcher's access to materials. This may be especially useful if using a collection requires securing advance permission from the donor or paging materials from an off-site storage location.

Reading Room Rules[3]

Include a listing of the regulations and procedures that will govern a researcher's access to your collections. As a general rule, it is wise to create a series of regulations that are clear and directly applicable to the researcher's likely experiences at your institution. Avoid cluttering the list with incidental rules. Common rules include: no food or drink, no smoking, pencils only, restrictions governing the use of laptops or cell phones, and hints for document care and handling (e.g., gloves for photographs, using the table to support oversized materials, etc.)

Always remember that historical records have material value and that there are unscrupulous individuals who will steal them. To avoid such an unpleasant situation, you must always supervise and control the use of your documents by strictly and evenhandedly enforcing your repository's registration and document use rules. Train your staff to recognize that there are no exceptions.

[3]A Google search of the phrase "special collections reading room rules" will result in a fair number of relevant examples of common reading room rules and procedures. Additionally, the previously mentioned publication, Sample Forms for Archival & Records Management Programs, includes a comprehensive listing of reading room rules.

Copying Services[4]

Providing researchers with copies of historic records is a valuable and extremely popular researcher service. However, when considering whether or not to offer duplication services you should realistically consider the direct and indirect costs of such a service in terms of potential document damage from handling and light exposure as well as increased administrative and material costs. If your repository does decide to offer duplication services, there are a number of copying policy considerations that should be addressed:

- **What types of documents will be copied? Are there types of documents or collections that you will not copy? Will your staff allow copies to be made of items that are oversized, bound, fragile, or damaged?**
- **Are there limits to the number of copies that a researcher can request? Will you copy entire collections?**
- **How will you make copies?**
- **Will you charge for copies? What is the exposure cost?**
- **Will you permit researchers to make their own copies using a photocopy machine, digital camera, or other device?**

After considering these issues, clearly state your institution's copying policies and procedures. This section should include specific details such as copy limits, duplication costs, and expected delivery time-frames. Additionally, this section commonly includes a blanket statement reserving the repository's right to refuse or limit a researcher's duplication request. An example of the wording of such a statement might be:

> The Repository reserves the right to refuse or to limit a duplication request in whole or in part. As a general rule the Repository will not duplicate entire collections nor will it fill duplication requests that exceed 100 pages.

Copyright Warning

As was discussed earlier, ownership of a document or collection does not equate to ownership of a document or collection's copyright (i.e., the right to produce and distribute copies of an item). Never assume that your institution holds an item's copyright. In your reference practices, make sure that it is clear in all policies, correspondence, and interactions with researchers that it is their responsibility to determine the copyright holder and to obtain permission to publish copyrighted materials. If necessary, you can stamp or mark all copies with a copyright statement such as "Copyright is retained by the authors of items in these papers, or their descendants, as stipulated by United States copyright law."

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[4] A number of special collection duplication policies are available on the web. The University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library has a comprehensive website with downloadable forms at http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/bhl/refhome/duppol.htm.

Below is a fictional example of a complete reference policy. For a very good example of a researcher registration form that incorporates key elements from a reference policy, see the form used by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Manuscripts Department; it is reproduced at the end of this chapter in Appendix 5A.

CAROLINA AZALEA GARDEN ARCHIVE

Information for Researchers

The Carolina Azalea Garden Archive (CAGA) identifies, collects, arranges, and preserves the historical records of The Carolina Azalea Garden. CAGA's collections are comprised of non-current records of varying formats having enduring administrative, legal, fiscal, historical, or scientific values that were created by the staff and volunteers of the Garden. These collections are made available to CAGA staff and scholars as well as other researchers in accordance with the stipulations recorded in their accession records.

Hours and Location:

The CAGA's reading room is open to researchers on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 am to 1 pm. Access at other times may be arranged with the archivist. We are located in the basement of Surry College's Hecht Library.

Registration:

Prior to receiving access to CAGA's archival holdings, all researchers must complete a registration form and provide valid photo identification (i.e., an institutional ID, passport, driver's license, etc.). Additionally, researchers must sign the daily research register.

Regulations:

1. Coats, briefcases, parcels, and personal books are not permitted in the research area.
2. No ink of any kind may be used in the research area. Use Pencils only.
3. Smoking, eating, and drinking are prohibited in the repository.
4. All archival materials must be handled carefully. Use only one folder at a time and keep the papers in their existing order. Do not lean or press on archival materials. Do not trace maps or other records.
5. No materials may be removed from the research area.
6. Researchers requesting access to restricted materials must contact the person or agency imposing the restrictions to secure permission for access. The archives cannot permit access to these materials without written authority.
7. Researchers are advised that it is their responsibility, not the archives, to obtain copyright clearance to publish or otherwise reproduce or distribute archival material.
8. When using the materials for research, please credit the archives by giving a full citation that includes the document title, date, folder number, and collection name. An example of the preferred form is: From Greenhouse Log No. 45, 17 August 1998, Folder 31, in the Coker Laboratory Papers #102, Carolina Azalea Garden Archive, Hecht Library, Surry College, Dobson, NC 27017.

Your compliance with these rules will help us in our efforts to preserve our collections for future use. Thank you for your cooperation.

Photocopying:

All photocopies must be made by archives staff. Researchers are not allowed to copy archival materials using their own equipment. Researchers must fill out a photocopy request form and flag materials that they want to have copied. Photocopies cost $0.25 each. We can fulfill no more than 50 copies per researcher per week. Certain fragile items may not be photocopied. Researchers requiring copies of photographs, oversized papers, and AV materials should consult the archivist about conditions and charges.

Providing an Appropriate Research Environment

Repositories and historical museums tend to be located in buildings that were not originally designed to support the needs or concerns of archivists and manuscript collections. Despite this seemingly inevitable fact of archival life, the staff of repositories needs to create a suitable research environment for their users within the space that they are allocated. Ideally, your research area is one that provides:

- **A registration area where researcher forms and registration procedures can be completed.**
- **A space where researchers can securely store their coats, briefcases, purses, and other personal belongings while they conduct their research.**
- **Copies of your Finding Aids, Catalogues, and any other guides to your collections.**
- **A dedicated space for the use of historical records by researchers that includes comfortable chairs and tables large enough to fully support oversized items.**
- **Access to appropriate reference materials.**

Finally, your reading room should be a welcoming and user-friendly environment that is quiet, well lit, and accessible to researchers who may require the use of a wheelchair or other assisting devices.

Successfully Working With Your Users

Repositories are fairly intimidating places; they are full of rules, alien bibliographic tools, and seemingly arcane administrative procedures. Moreover, they house rare and valuable historic collections. In short, you work in the type of environment that could easily frighten off or intimidate a potential user. To counter the effects of the "mysteries of the archives" you should greet your users, especially unknown or first-time users, and help usher them through the registration process, secure their valuables, and explain the nature of your collections and the rules and procedures for using them.

You will probably need to take the time to introduce novice users to the systems that your institution employs to catalog and request collections. A printed handout detailing the usual search and request steps is a valuable aid, however, it should be noted that a printed set of instructions, in and of itself, is not a sufficient replacement for the role played by a patient, well informed, and engaged archivist.

The Reference Interview

Once a researcher has been registered or logged in, your role is to help him or her locate relevant materials. The library science terminology for the interaction between you and the inquiring patron is "the reference interview." Stripped to its essential the Reference Interview is best understood as a continuing conversation between you and the researcher about their research needs and the resources and services available in your repository. The end goal is to match your institution's resources with the researcher's needs. For a novice researcher this may be a very involved process involving a considerable amount of discussion about their research question, archival research processes, bibliographic tools, and repository procedures. In contrast, the experienced researcher may simply want you to pull a particular folder, box, or collection. The key to making both interactions successful is for you to carefully listen to a researcher's needs and craft an appropriately measured and nuanced response.

If a researcher's requirements extend beyond your local collections be prepared to direct the user to other collection's or resources that may be of use. Keep addresses and telephone numbers of other institutions ready for quick reference.

Calling or Paging Collections

Your historical records should be securely housed in an area that is not directly accessible to researchers (i.e., closed stacks). Records should be retrieved and re-shelved by your staff. To request a collection, all researchers, including staff members, must complete a Call Slip that includes the collection's title and unique number, the unit requested (e.g., box or folder), the date of the request, and the researcher's name. During this paging process your staff should be instructed to examine the papers requested to make sure that they are not under any access restrictions. If the papers are restricted, a researcher should not be allowed to review them without having first secured the appropriate permissions. Your staff should also review the materials to determine whether the materials are fragile or so valuable that they require special handling. If this is the case, it may make a great deal of sense to replace the original with a reading copy. Finally, have your staff check to see if the materials are unprocessed. Most repositories will not make unprocessed and uncontrolled collections available to researchers.

The information contained on your Call Slips should allow you to monitor collection use and identify researchers who were present during a specific period. You should keep and maintain registration and call documents for several years after they have been created so that you are able to retrace collection use in the event of theft, loss, misfiling, or damage. Quite often the slips are filed by date or collection number for ready reference. A sample Call Slip is presented below.

Azalea Garden Carolina Archive	Request Date 2/24/06	Collection Item No. 102
Collection Title Coker Laboratory Papers #102		
Box # 2		Folder # 31
Last Name Coker	First Name Stephanie	
Signature Stephanie Coker		

Remote Reference

Inevitably, your repository will receive reference and research questions from users via telephone, email, and surface mail. At a minimum, your institution should be willing and able to impart basic information about your services, reading room hours, holdings and finding aids over the telephone. However, many of these inquiries will go beyond general administrative or procedural questions and request detailed information or copies of items; in short, tasks that will require substantial amounts of your staff's time. In defining your institution's policies for handling such requests, you may want to consider the following issues:

- **What is the role of your staff?** Archivists, like librarians, are information intermediaries whose essential role is to support the work of others by providing them with the information that they need to use the collections in pursuit of their specific goals. Always remember that the researcher is the one who should be doing the research.
- **What are the limits to the level of service that your staff will provide? (i.e., How much research will you do for people?)** Some research tasks are very simple, while others may involve the need to carry out extensive research and analysis. What sort of tasks will you allow your staff to carry out?
- **Is there a fee for this level of service?** Given the normal constraints of time and money, will your institution charge a fee for research services? If so, you should develop a fee schedule and secure a patron's agreement to pay these charges prior to undertaking any research tasks. To avoid disappointing your patrons and increasing your staff's workload, you may want to consider creating a list of local professional researchers that you could recommend to your patrons. These researchers should operate independently of your institution and arrange their own financial terms with the contacting patron.

Public Service Exercise: Working with Patrons

Four Scenarios to Consider

I. You are responsible for the local history collection at the public library. A young woman accompanied by a three year old arrives. She asks to use a collection of rare maps of the town.

- How family friendly can an archive be?
- Should you add a new restriction concerning young children to your reading room rules?

II. You are a corporate archivist. Your office is 5 blocks away from headquarters. The Corporate Secretary calls, and asks you to bring over immediately the company's first minute book.

- Do you violate your own rules and allow material to leave the reading room?
- How does your role as unit in a private commercial enterprise impact your archival operations?

III. You are the reference archivist for a North Carolina genealogical society. An

APPENDIX 5A

Manuscripts Department

Southern Historical Collection
Southern Folklife Collection
University Archives

Today's Date ______________________

Your Name ____

Street Address ____

City/State ______________________________ Postal Code ______________

Country (if not USA) ______________ Phone ______________________

Email Address ____

UNC Chapel Hill Affiliation? ☐ *YES* ☐ *NO*

Other Institutional Affiliation (if any) ______________________________

Current Academic Status (if any) ☐ Undergraduate Student ☐ Graduate Student ☐ Faculty ☐ Staff

How did you learn about the Manuscripts Department and our holdings?

☐ Citation in published work ☐ Online catalog ☐ Word of mouth
☐ World Wide Web ☐ Instructor ☐ Printed guide
☐ Referral from other library ☐ *National Union Catalog of Manuscripts Collections* (print)

Subject of Research ____

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Research Area

☐ African Americana ☐ Business History ☐ Civil War ☐ Family ☐ Folklife ☐ Journalism
☐ Legal ☐ Literary ☐ Media ☐ Antebellum plantation era ☐ Political
☐ Publishing ☐ Southern ☐ UNC ☐ WWI ☐ WWII ☐ Other

Research Director/Instructor (if any) ______________________________

R e s e a r c h   A g r e e m e n t

- Manuscripts are used in the Search Room during the Department's hours of operation.
- The Department provides notepaper, note cards, and pencils for researchers.
- You may bring the following items into the Search Room: laptop computers, PDA's, pencils, and the department's finding aids

  All other items, including purses, bags, folders, binders, notebooks, and outside paper are prohibited. Lockers are provided to store your belongings.

Requesting

- Use call slips to make requests.
- Complete one call slip per collection or call number.
- Make all requests before 4:30 p.m. or 12:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Handling

- Be gentle.
- Keep the documents flat on the table.
- Do not place any items (e.g. laptops, note cards etc.) on top of the manuscript material.
- Keep manuscripts in their original filing order.
- Bring any misfiled items to the attention of the staff. Do not re-file any misfiled items.
- Do not remove metal fasteners (e.g. staples, paper clips) from the manuscripts. A staff member will remove them for you.

Duplication

- Please see staff for instructions and details on copy requests.
- We reserve the right to refuse any copy request.

Search Room

- Do not exit the Search Room with manuscript items.
- Ring the doorbell next to the Public Services window for assistance.
- Keep conversation in the Search Room to a minimum. **No** cell phones.
- Return materials to the Public Services window.
- Exit the Search Room at least ten minutes prior to closing (M-F 4:50 p.m. and Sat. 12:50 p.m.).
- Present all items (computers, notes, note cards, etc.) brought in or out of the Search Room to a staff member for inspection.

I have read, understood, and by my signature below, agree to comply with the regulations set forth above, in order to use the material in the custody of the Manuscripts Department.

Signature ____ Date __________________________